

Legislative Report 2006

Spring 2006

Dear Neighbors,

Coming to Olympia for a legislative session is always more productive with a positive state budget outlook. This year was particularly good: A healthy economy resulted in better-than-expected additional state revenues of \$1.6 billion. As a result, the Legislature was able to invest in Washington's schools, health care, and public safety, while putting \$941 million away for the next biennium. We:

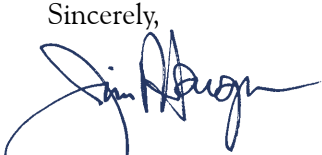
- Boosted health insurance enrollment for low-income citizens and children;
- Gave students more resources to achieve state academic standards;
- Cracked down on sex offenders and tackled Washington's growing meth epidemic, thanks to a package of bills shepherded through the Legislature by Sen. Hargrove;
- Secured funding to widen the dangerous stretch of Highway 101 between Sequim and Port Angeles; and
- Eliminated the \$5 day-use parking fee at state parks, thanks to Rep. Kessler's bill, which recognized that the fee was unfairly keeping our citizens out of their own parks.

We secured funding to help preserve local jobs at the Grays Harbor Paper mill in Hoquiam. The supplemental budget includes \$7.5 million for a new biomass turbine at the facility. We also provided tax relief for timber and forest products companies. This industry needs all of our help to stay viable in a time of rising costs and global competition.

It was a busy session – and a satisfying one. As always, working in a bipartisan manner was the best way to get things accomplished and to effectively represent our communities.

We are honored to serve the people of the 24th District. Please continue to contact our offices with your questions and comments.

Sincerely,



Sen. Jim Hargrove
State Senator



Rep. Lynn Kessler
State Representative

BULLETIN

We share the community's concerns about the closure of the Virginia Mason clinic in Port Angeles, and want to assure you that we are following the issue closely. We sent Virginia Mason officials a letter on March 27 urging them to assist Olympic Medical Center in reaching a viable solution that is in the best interest of the patients. We will continue working with Gov. Chris Gregoire to help ensure a safe transition for those thousands of patients who received care at the clinic.



Sen. Jim Hargrove



Rep. Lynn Kessler

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A session of breakthroughs

This session resulted in an astounding number of historic agreements:

- **Energy Freedom** – We established a grant and loan program for funding alternative energy projects that will enable us to begin addressing our dependency on foreign oil, and create jobs for workers and opportunities for our farmers.
- **Medical malpractice** – Following the defeat of two competing ballot measures last November, the Legislature approved a groundbreaking compromise that saves lives by reducing medical errors, lowers premiums for doctors, and reforms our civil liability system.
- **Columbia River Basin** – Decades of haggling came to an end with a breakthrough compromise agreement that will preserve the Columbia River for farmers, commerce and fish.
- **Unemployment insurance** – We finalized a reform that will result in workers getting better benefits and employers getting a system that is affordable and sustainable – an historic and balanced compromise solution.
- **Election reform** – Washington's long-standing late summer primary date was moved up a full month in order to assure adequate time for soldiers' and other overseas ballots to be sent and returned on time.

Local Issues:

Tax relief for the timber industry

We reduced the state business taxes on the timber industry by \$4.6 million per year over the next two decades. The timber industry is Washington's third-largest manufacturing sector, and deserves the same shot in the arm that Boeing received a few years ago.

Kessler goes to bat for transportation

There are 52 state-funded transportation projects within the 24th Legislative District, at a total cost of more than \$605 million over the next 12 years. Rep. Kessler was instrumental in getting these much-needed improvements into the budget. The projects include ferry terminal improvements in Port Townsend, slide repairs on highway 112, replacing the Fork Hoquiam River Bridge, work on rest areas, and several paving projects.

Most important to us, though, is the \$32 million that Rep. Kessler secured to widen the dangerous stretch of Highway 101 from Shore Road to Kitchen Road, and funding for increased costs on the Hood Canal Bridge replacement project.

Growth Management Act

The Legislature passed a bill that gives smaller and slower-growing cities and counties extra time to complete updates of comprehensive plans due under the Growth Management Act. This extension allows smaller counties and cities to focus their resources on more pressing needs, if circumstances don't require an immediate update.

Some smaller communities likely do not have the same impact on the environment as larger cities. Such communities need flexibility in updating their plans.

Kessler works to stabilize property tax bills

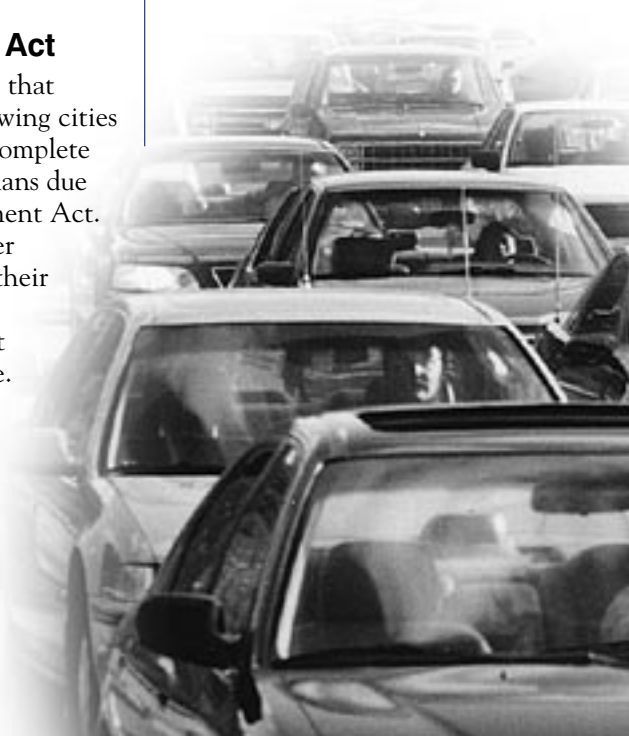
Rep. Kessler co-sponsored a measure to add predictability and stability to property tax bills in rural counties.

We will continue to work on this issue throughout this interim and introduce property tax relief legislation next January.

ORV parks

Off-road vehicles (ORVs) are increasingly popular, but the number of family-friendly places where enthusiasts can legally ride them is dwindling due to neighborhood concerns about noise and liability.

Coastal Caucus lawmakers were successful in securing a provision that protects Grays Harbor County from liability for ORV accidents that occur at the park east of McCleary. The overriding bill, House Bill 2617, allows cities with a population of less than 3,000 to use ORVs on designated streets or highways within its boundaries. Vehicles must be registered through the Department of Licensing and operators are required to wear helmets.



Public Safety:

The growing meth scourge

Washington's methamphetamines epidemic is a threat to the safety and health of our communities. After serving on an interim task force, Sen. Hargrove worked with the Attorney General's Office and others to craft a wide-ranging anti-meth bill that the Legislature approved unanimously. We tackled this growing problem by:

- Funding three pilot programs to fight meth, including a program for Pacific, Wahkiakum, Lewis, Grays Harbor and Cowlitz counties.
- Giving local authorities tools to clean up properties contaminated by meth labs.
- Increasing treatment options for people addicted to meth.
- Adding 100 drug treatment beds to correctional facilities.
- Directing state officials to consult with faith-based groups that might have services to help people with chemical addictions.

Hargrove protects communities from sex offenders

Washington remains a national leader in protecting citizens from sex offenders. Sen. Hargrove shepherded through the Legislature a package of bills aimed at keeping Washington's families safe from predators.

It was important to both of us to pass legislation that didn't just sound tough, but actually made our communities safer. The measures we passed this session will:

- Impose minimum 25-year sentences for violent sex offenses against children and vulnerable adults.
- Improve community awareness through educational materials for parents and community members.
- Tighten registration and monitoring requirements for sex offenders, including those moving to Washington from other states.
- Authorize the Department of Corrections to use electronic monitoring of sex offenders.

- Increase penalties for crimes such as voyeurism, possession of child pornography and Internet grooming, which often lead to other sex crimes.
- Allow employees of facilities where children go for care, recreation or education to order sex offenders off the premises.
- Increase funding for victims' services.

Mental health treatment

High-quality, accessible mental health treatment is critical to keeping our communities safe and our citizens healthy. We invested in our state mental health programs by including an additional \$46 million to replace federal cuts and expand funding for public mental health services.





Education:

Excellence at all ages

Early Learning

Children are born ready to learn. Research shows that the first years of a child's life are critical in laying the foundation for successful learning. Parents seeking preschool or child care need good information about high-quality programs in their communities.

This session, we approved the creation of a state-level Department of Early Learning to:

- Consolidate existing state early learning programs.
- Give parents better information about locally available early learning programs.

WASL

This year's 10th-graders are the first class required to pass the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) or an alternative assessment

to graduate. While we may have differing opinions on the value of this test, we do agree that students deserve every resource to achieve Washington's high academic standards.

This session, as students were sharpening their pencils and preparing to take the test, the Legislature was putting in place a system to help them succeed. Our steps included:

- Approving \$28 million in remediation to help struggling students.
- Creating a study to identify barriers to student achievement, and possible options to augment the current assessment system.
- Approving a menu of alternative assessments to provide a fair way for students who simply aren't good at high-pressured tests to demonstrate their knowledge.

Higher education

Higher education is tied very closely to economic development. We want our kids to be competitive in the high-demand fields of nursing, engineering, computer sciences and math, so we:

- Opened up 500 new slots in colleges around the state that focus on those areas.
- Started a new Opportunity Grants program to provide tuition, books and other expenses to 400 low-income high school graduates or older adults so they can get the training they need to fill these high-demand jobs.

Foster youth support

Children who are placed in foster care deserve the chance to finish their education and get a good start on their adult lives. When foster youth turn 18, they lose state assistance in housing, medical and financial matters at a time when they need support to transition to adulthood. This session, we:

- Gave 50 foster youth per year access to much-needed state support and transitional services until age 21.
- Directed the Washington Department of Social and Health Services to establish a foster care parent support program to help those working with special needs and hard-to-place foster youth.

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